

Lake Michigan Fisheries Team
9 am to 3 pm, Wednesday, November 16, 2005
Manitowoc County Training Room, Lakeshore Technical College

Draft Notes – prepared by Bill Horns

Present: Steve Hogler, Kevin Kapuscinski, Mike Donofrio, Matt Mangan, Lee Meyers, Bill Horns, Brad Eggold, Matt Coffaro, Paul Peeters, George Boronow, Tim Simonson, Pradeep Hirethota, John Janssen

1. Review/revise/cull agenda

2. Review/approve meeting notes from September 8, 2005

3. Brief updates

Time was be allowed for short updates and reminders of topics of interest. The following were mentioned:

- Lakewide salmon stocking reduction (25% lakewide, 21% in Wisconsin).
 - Note: It was suggested that the allocation among sites within Wisconsin of the 21% Wisconsin reduction be split between regions in proportion to past stocking allocations and distributed within each region according to the recommendation of that region.
- Revised schedule for review of Lake Trout Rehabilitation Plan.
 - Note: I have posted the draft Plan on FH Common in a folder called “LMFT”. It has a few of my comments, but I will add more. LMFT members may insert comments at any time. We have until December 10 to provide final comments to the LMC.
- Stocking of 150,000 surplus lake trout fall fingerlings.
- Updating LMFT charge.
 - Note: At some point the charge will have to be updated to reflect various retirements and to reflect the hiring of regional fisheries supervisors. It was suggested that the Policy Committee be reduced back to three (two regional fish supervisors and the Great Lakes Fisheries Specialist) when the supervisor positions have been filled. That recommendation would be considered at the appropriate time by the Guidance Team. In the mean time, George Boronow will fill the Toney's vacancy on the Policy Committee.
- CORA signs the Joint Strategic Plan.
- Sharp decline in chinook egg size.
- Green Bay walleye and sturgeon rules in Spring Hearing package.
 - Note: I have a gap in my notes here. I think I have to get with Hennessy regarding timely promulgation of these rules. Someone remind me.
- Michigan's Natural Resource Leadership Project.
- Great Lakes Lake Sturgeon tag ID database.
- Heads up: present chub fishing depth rule sunsets July 1, 2007.
- Concerns regarding floating gill nets and trap nets.
 - Note: Paul described the present limited use of suspended gill nets. We will discuss this again at a later meeting when Tom Hansen is able to attend.
- Hickey/Eggebraaten concerns regarding walleye in Green Bay.
- Lake Michigan yellow perch outlook.
- Stakeholder meeting re Great Lakes coordination, Nov. 10.
- Policy regarding tournament requests.
- Spotted muskie gamete collection plan.
- Cormorant research and plans regarding possible control actions.

4. Yellow perch regulations on Green Bay

Background. On December 7 the Natural Resources Board will be asked to adopt a revision of FH-27-05, regarding sport and commercial harvest of yellow perch from Green Bay. The rule that will go for adoption is identical to the original rule, except that the sportfishing daily bag limit is 15 instead of 25.

Action. The team discussed the issue and reviewed available data on the ages of sport-caught perch. Brad and others will push to have 2005 creel survey results available for the NRB meeting in December. It was noted that, as is always the case with yellow perch, females will recruit in to the sport and commercial fisheries before males. Matt's data indicate that females of the 2003 year class already comprised the majority of the sport harvest in 2005. Data circulated after the meeting show that the 2003 year class had not been recruited into the commercial fishery in 2005, but I would expect females from the 2003 year class to dominate the May-June harvest in 2006.

5. Food for thought.

Background. I offered the following ideas as "Food for thought and discussion":

- Retire and don't replace the Barney when it is deemed unseaworthy. The Barney has been an efficient, essential, and economical work horse, but a new boat could be a white elephant. Use contracts with commercial fishers to obtain essential data that cannot be obtained otherwise.
- Let the USFWS and USGS handle lake trout, chub, and forage assessments with their big boats.
- Devote all of our boat maintenance/improvement resources to the Perca.
- When Don Beilfuss retires, move that position to an anadromous fish biologist position. This would be someone who would develop systems for tracking all aspects of our feral brood stock propagation work, including genetic selection issues, hatchery production goals, escapement of stocked fish from streams, etc.
- Move biologist/tech time now devoted to lake trout, whitefish, chubs to nearshore issues (sturgeon, smallmouth bass, walleye, musky). The only qualification being that we continue to commit some time and effort to tracking and responding to issues that may arise related to incidental catch in whitefish and chub gear.
- In other words, split up the work between us and the feds. They do the open lake stuff, we do the nearshore and streams. They assess lake trout, chubs, forage, lake herring (in our dreams), and open-lake ecosystem stuff; we assess yellow perch, sturgeon, smallmouth bass, musky, etc. They have the big boats, we have the smaller, more versatile, less-expensive-to-operate nearshore boat.
- Adopt the policy of increasing or decreasing whitefish and bloater harvest limits if the commercial fishers can demonstrate the need with our data or with good data that they produce.
- Set yellow perch harvest limits automatically based on creel data, and (maybe) save some money on yellow perch assessments, if that can be done while still sustaining the SCAA models (maybe by banking biological samples for less frequent age/growth analyses).

Action. Team members had some serious reservations about these ideas, particularly questioning the wisdom of not replacing the Barney. The following comments and observations were made:

- What is the problem being addressed by these suggestions?
- Contracting with commercial fishers, in the absence of a new boat, could be quite expensive.
- The availability of Federal boats might be quite limited. Our assessment needs would overlap in time with existing uses of those boats.
- If we don't replace the boat, the boat captain position number might be moved off of Lake Michigan, not re-assigned to Lake Michigan work.
- DNR has a clear responsibility to assess commercial fish populations.
- DNR should not be seen to be abdicating its management responsibilities for commercial species. To the extent that we reduce our direct involvement in assessments of commercial species, we also reduce our credibility regarding setting allowable harvests.

- There are other assessment/data needs that could be met with a replacement for the Barney, including off-shore habitat surveys and open-water salmonine surveys.
- In the absence of a replacement, demands on the Perca will increase.
- There have been some discussions in the UW-Water Institute of acquiring a new research vessel. Perhaps such a boat could be shared by UW and DNR.

6. Lake Michigan Fisheries Forum membership

Background. Three members of the LMFF are reaching the ends of their terms: Billy Willis, Chuck Weier, and Lee Haasch. We need to come up with replacements.

Action. A number of candidates were suggested.

7. Salmon stamp funds.

Background. Revenue from the sale of Salmon Stamps and 2-day licenses in the past year was greater than expected. Steve Hewett has asked us to discuss possible uses for the additional funds.

Action. After discussion, there was support for further consideration of six possible initiatives, listed below. Some of these might involve recruiting John Janssen, DNR staff in ISS, or an outside investigator to help develop and/or implement the project. We tallied the number of team members favoring each project and the number not favoring each project. Those numbers are shown below as a ratio (for/against)

- (7/0) Develop a systematic review of all phases of feral brood stock management (all salmonine species). In my thinking this would involve synthesizing field, weir, and hatchery reports into a single annual report that captures both measures of success (e.g., creel data, weir returns, size-at-age, maintenance of summer and fall-run steelhead strains) and indices of factors we control (e.g., size-at-stocking, smoltification status at stocking, hatchery variables, weir selection variables). This would allow us over time to systematically explore how the factors we control influence the outcomes we want.
- (3/4) Expand Steve Hogler's work on stream survival of stocked steelhead.
- (1/7) Initiate a program of selecting for older age at maturity in chinook salmon.
- (9/0) Invest the money in KMSFH or Wild Rose if by that means we can produce more and larger steelhead yearlings for stocking.
- (6/4) Mark all or a known fraction of chinook salmon as a part of a lakewide project to estimate natural reproduction.
- (9/1) Expand the creel survey to capture early spring and late fall fishing.
- (0/9) Initiate a new salmon diet study.

8. Project ideas for research and habitat rehabilitation grants.

Background. Mike Donofrio suggested that we could do a better job of developing project ideas for external funding, possibly maintaining a list of specific ideas so that when funding becomes available we are ready with an idea that matches the funding source.

Action. After a brief discussion we decided to devote significant time to this at a later meeting.

9. Next meeting date and location

January 26, 2006. Milwaukee.